judicial inquiry at Ambam in 1948 after a raid on ze mimfaka, an old chief who was a Protestant and an elder of his church declared, in so many words, that "the white man has weakened the ngil, and the beyem have taken it over; now it is the ngil of ngbwel /sorcery/."

The initiates of the kôn or kun, a kind of magic that enables one to assume another person's strength without destroying his body, also seem to be grouped into a secret society with meetings every seven years.

Beyem associations do not usually include both sexes; male and female sorcerers meet together only occasionally, for orgiastic sabbaths.

The distinction between white and black magic is, nevertheless, difficult to draw the present time, and one can never tell offhand if the small groups springing up nearly everywhere to protect their members against bad luck by using, in addition to remnants of traditional rites, recipes copied from magic manuals printed in France, belong to the one or the other.

To come back tothe traditional associations, we must underline /the fact that/ in them there was a complete separation of the sexes, to such an extent that women were often forbidden to speak the name of a men's society or to show any kind of knowledge, even superficial, of its rites. The prohibition was less stringent for men with regard to women's rites, since the niem, the breaking of a taboo, was for them punished by physical incapacity or illness rather than by death. /66/

A women's rite like mevungu had both a village aspect, on account of its geographical framework, the jurisdiction of its huts, and an interclan-aspect as a result of exogamy. Much less is known of these women's rites than of the men's, for the very good reason that men are not allowed to know anything about them. Missionaries have condemned mevungu as obscene: I have heard that initiates who have gone through the menopause are supposed to play a male role in dances miming coition, without being able to obtain the slightest proof or the least detail (1). What is certain is that this is a rite of

1. A woman "chosen for her large vagina" presided, seated with legs spread apart. Each initiate would go tickle her and pull the clitoris. (J. B.)

fecundity, of fertility, and also of the hunt: an unlucky hunter may have his wife initiated so as to ward off bad luck.

754 the évu or the animal employed as assistant being killed during a skirmish, which would bring about the nnem's death.

Many people nevertheless regard these disadvantages as weighing little against the immediate advantages which the évu procures. Therefore some bemie (people without évu) have themselves initiated into ngbwel, and some beyem dedicate their children from birth (which has the additional effect of protecting them against the parent's évu). For this purpose beyem organize into secret societies (and these are really secret societies), well described by Trilles and particularly so by Lavigrotte (no. 155).

754 Babies are dedicated by a nnem kinsman in a ceremony, aka'é, 19 before the umbilicus is healed (the évu is believed to enter through the umbilical lesion). A special taboo is imposed on the child, and a part of his body (finger, toe or even foot, hand or whole arm) is symbolically sacrificed to the évu with a slight letting of blood. From that time on, only the shade of the sacrificed part, its semblance, is believed to continue to exist. The child is then nkôman ngbwel /118/, prepared for the ngbwel, but he is not yet a nnem; if he were it would be discovered at the preliminary stage of the adolescent initiation, and he would be put to death. It is only at the time of initiation with the official rites that he becomes a sorcerer, kuli 754 ngbwel, through a further ceremony during which his "godparents" reveal to him that he has been "prepared," dedicated. He must then buy back the bodily part "sacrificed" at the aka'é by offering his "godparents" the body of a member of his family, killed and eaten by the beyem in circumstances about which little is known. What is known suggests some of the sexual aspects of European witches' sabbaths 756 (apparently participants of both sexes, naked, practiced sodomy, 839 bisik, and profaned the ancestral relics, probably fragments of biéti). The initiation of an adult consists only of the akuli ngbwel, the aka'é being restricted to children.

754 Beyem meet periodically, aside from initiation ceremonies, in 758 order to "feed the bivu" in anthropophagous or necrophagous meals accompanied by obscene rituals. These meetings take place at the new moon in secret places in the forest, usually in clearings on top of hills or on islands in marshes — mmimie are afraid of stumbling by chance on one of these spots which, according to some of my in- 825 formants, are guarded between meetings by an aardvark, mvômesila. If such a place is discovered, a nnengan is immediately called in to 755 perform a sort of exorcism.

575
754

1. Sorcerers, following the example of practitioners, have and still do set up secret societies:

a) throughout the entire Fan tribe;

b) in neighboring Bantu tribes.

I might here point out that I have never come across such associations among other African peoples, such as the Pygmies.

2. These secret societies meet at night in very mysterious fashion.

[786] 3. They are always essentially licentious to such a degree that, according to many writers, unbridled obscenity is the main objective. In my opinion, it is primarily an accompanying circumstance, aimed at controlling and binding the initiates by means of highly erotic and degrading pleasures.

However -- and this is my final point here -- there is one fact which has many a time misled the most conscientious observers, the most eager to learn the truth, and which, combined with the rule of secrecy, curiously complicates the problem. Just as practitioners have ranks and a hierarchy in their secret societies, so sorcerers have instituted ranks and a highly organized hierarchy. Hence there are several kinds of gatherings. Sometimes there is a sort of general assembly for all who belong to the association, in which case the purpose is a celebration, almost always of revolting obscenity and cruelty. All the witnesses clearly agree on this point.

But beside these "general" celebrations for the whole membership, there are others of a much more secret character to which only sorcerers, the true and sole leaders of these assemblies, are invited. Notified by a password to which I shall shortly refer, they gather at the appointed place and there [452] a very particular kind of feast takes place about which it is difficult to give precise details. It can well be imagined that those who belong to these associations keep silent. The rule of secrecy is absolute and inexorable; moreover, their own interest is at stake. It will always be very hard, if not impossible, to throw light on many facts and factors whose disclosure would nevertheless be extremely valuable from the religious point of view.

[Two paragraphs omitted. --Translator]